proposal for assistance for diversification process has so far been received by the Ministry of Agriculture from the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Crop damage due to unseasonal rain in Andhra Pradesh

166. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether unseasonal rain in the first week of January,2002 has adversely affected and damaged the Groundnuts, Paddy, Bengal, Gram, Tabacco, Maize and Cotton crops in several districts of Andhra Pradesh;

(b) whether the hailstorms also inflicted heavy damage to crops in many districts;

(c) whether Central Government were approached by the State Government for help to meet the situation and provide relief to farmers; and

(d) if so, what is Government's response in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) to (d) Ministry of Agriculture have not received any such report or request from the State Government for the purpose of assistance from National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF).

Steering Group on Agriculture

167. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether report of the Steering Group onAgriculture and Allied Sectors has since been received;

(b) if so, what are its main recommendations, especially with regard to retaining 500 million youths to the farm sector;

(c) whether the committee has also proposed a scheme for development of waste land in a big way all over the country and warned Government of water shortage, emerging as a major issue in the near future; and

(d) if so, what is the decision of Government and the steps being taken on each of the recommendation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Steering Group has, among others, recommended for creation of opportunities for the self employment of rural youth by helping them to set up their own agri-enterprises/agri-ventures or by providing them land based employement opportunities and to provide credit facilities through commercial institutions. Besides, the Steering Group has also recommended for taking policy measures to ensure unrestricted movement of agri-commodities, rural roads and godowns, encouraging live stock enterprises, agro-forestry, tree farming, freedom for cutting/logging all tree species grown on farmers' land to attract rural educated youth to set up agri-business centres/enterprises.

(c) The Streering group has also recommended for waste land development using Sampooran Gramin Rozgar Yojana. It has suggested that all the Waste Land under public ownership could be allotted to the landless/poor households for development in viable units of 2 ha. each. The participant families should be supported by the Central and State Governments in terms of loans and subsidy facilities and technical help. A credit link subsidy programme could be chalked out for assisting the participants to help develop the allotted land and utilizing for agricultural activities of their choice, like crop raising, horticulture, agro-forestry, dairying, fisheries, etc., provided 50% of the land is put under useful tree cover appropriate to the eco-system. The Steering Group has also observed that the scarcity of water in rain-fed areas is causing serious hardwhip, the availability of water is declining at the national level and has suggested that effective ground water recharging measures as also regulations for sustainable exploitation needs to be put in place on urgent basis.

(d) The Steering Group on Agriculture and Allied Sectors was constituted for the formulation of the X Five Year Plan and the Plan is yet to start. The Report of the Steering Group has been circulated to all the concerned nodal Central Departments/Ministries and also to all States and UTs for consideration.

Assistance to drought affected States

168. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAIKAR: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the details of financial assistance provided to States affected by severe drought in the years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, State-wise and year-wise;

(b) whether the Karnataka Government has submitted a proposal for